NATIONALE CONFERENTIE

BREDE WELVAART

IMPACT ECONOMY FOUNDATION

How Fairphone makes fair and repairable phones competitive



150,000
devices sold last year

41%
sales growth in 2025

50%+
fair-mined and recycled material

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What if the longest-lasting phone was also the most competitive?

Fairphone, the maker of repairable, fairly sourced smartphones, is working hard to achieve this in the market. Last year they sold 150,000 devices, up from just over 100,000 the year before, a rise of more than 40%. Significantly, 78% of buyers of the Fairphone Gen 6 were new to the brand, all of this occurring while the overall smartphone market shrank.

In an interview, *Monique Lempers, Chief Impact & Operating Officer at Fairphone*, discusses what it takes to make fair and repairable phones the standard and how market incentives can help them scale so the rest of the market follows.

How Fairphone competes

Fairphone set out to change how fair and repairable phones are seen.

"*For a long time, ethical was seen as second best, and repairable as more fragile,*" says Lempers. "*We countered that logic and proved that you don't have to compromise on performance.*"

The evidence is clear. The new Gen 6 is made up of over 50% fair-mined and recycled material. The product carbon footprint is 29kg CO_2e, down from 42kg, a 30% reduction over three years of use, driven by both an increased use of recycled materials in the new model and the use of renewable electricity in the component manufacturing.

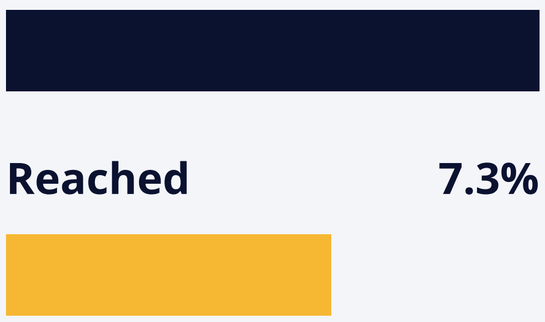
"For a long time ethical was seen as second best, and repairable as more fragile. We countered that logic and proved that you don't have to compromise on performance."

Although Fairphone's growth has been impactful, it does come with a tradeoff: *"Our last report showed that, although we reduced our footprint at company level, it fell short of what we had aimed for,"* says Lempers. *"That was mainly because we grew so much faster."*

In 2025, Fairphone's sales grew by 41% year on year, its strongest growth since 2020. Fairphone aimed to cut emissions by 12%, but reached 7.3%. Selling more phones puts upward pressure on Fairphone's absolute footprint, even as the footprint per device falls. Across the industry, the picture changes, because Fairphone's growth in a shrinking market means its phones are replacing conventional ones rather than adding to them.

"A shrinking market with a growing Fairphone shows that people are choosing us instead of another device, not adding ours on top," Lempers says.

Emission reduction, 2025



41%

sales growth in 2025, the strongest since 2020

Bringing the market along

Fairphone acts as a blueprint for the rest of the industry. *"Our mission is to inspire the industry by showing there is a market for ethical products,"* says Monique Lempers. That means not just talking about ethical challenges, but creating solutions.

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Together with a partner on the ground, Fairphone took the initiative to set up the Fair Cobalt Alliance to create a fair source for cobalt. This brought other brands on board, including Google and Tesla, to tackle the issues in the cobalt supply chain together.

The company also contributes to policy change as part of the right-to-repair movement. The resulting European rules are a good step: they require longer software support for all brands, spare-parts availability, fair prices for those parts, and a certain level of repairability. However, the regulation is *“not watertight,”* says Lempers, and further work remains.

The barrier of economies of scale

A barrier faced in making fair phones the norm is scale. *“It is not so much about fairness, but really the economies of scale*,” says Lempers.

Large manufacturers buy materials in volumes that lower the cost per unit. As major clients, they also have more leverage in negotiations with suppliers, who are more inclined to respond to a large buyer than to a smaller one. For Fairphone, this is why growth matters: it is the first way to close the distance to the big players.

The costs of fairness do exist in the form of premiums for fairly sourced materials, living wage bonuses for factory workers, the design of modular devices, and longer software support and warranty. According to Lempers, however, they are relatively limited and can largely be absorbed at higher volumes. In concrete terms, fair materials, credits, and living wage payments, modularity and longer software support add roughly $21 to $23 per phone, on top of a typical cost price of $300 to $400 for a mid-range smartphone. Living wage bonuses alone cost just over $1 per phone. The larger the company, the smaller the relative impact, which means cost is no valid reason to avoid fair practices.

additional costs per fairphone

$21–23

for fair materials, living wages, modularity, software support

~$1

living wage bonuses alone

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Market Transformation

Growth alone is only the first move toward making fair, repairable phones the market norm. The next step requires a shift of market rules.

01

Governments as launching customers

Governments can start by buying what they say they want to support. Lempers sees a clear opportunity for the Dutch government, and governments in the other European countries where Fairphone is on the market, to act as a launching customer. *“When you have a great product that is both sustainable and high-performing, the strongest endorsement is your own government using it in its procurement,”* Lempers points out. *“It’s quite a no-brainer to start with.”*

02

Smarter right-to-repair

The European right-to-repair rules are a strong foundation, and the next step is to make sure they deliver longer-lasting devices. That means closing loopholes, such as the exemption from repairability requirements for phones with a high water-resistance rating, and defining the rules so that repair keeps products in use for longer, not as a goal in itself. The rules, Lempers says, should give *“the right incentive that repair becomes a driver for longevity and not that it’s repair for repair only.”*

03

Tax incentives that reward circularity

Tax policy can make the longer-lasting choice the better one. *“Circularity starts with longevity, namely using the device as long as you can,”* says Lempers, and she would like to see tax incentives that favour repair services, spare parts, secondhand devices and circularly designed products.

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Making the most impactful, the most competitive

Fairphone has shown that a fair and repairable phone can compete. Its next steps are to extend the life of its devices further, raise its share of fairly sourced materials, and take on new minerals such as nickel and tantalum. The next step for the market is to reward it, so that competing on impact is no longer the exception.



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TRUE PROFITS ALLIANCE

The True Profits initiative works on making sure positive impact is rewarded in the market. The True Profits alliance is made up of business leaders who are shaping the case for an economy where impact is a competitive advantage